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Leading Ideas



| Fast Forwarding Your Church's Community Engagement

By Reggie McNeal On October 26, 2011

Leading Ideas

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Many churches today are pioneering a shift in which they are truly engaging their communities in mission. These churches are not only deploying their own members for service; they are engaging with people who aren't part of their church, but who are attracted to rolling up their sleeves to bless the community. They are strategically engaging with other churches and non-church organizations. These churches are moving from ministry *for* the community and in the community, to ministry *with* the community. This new movement is a rise in churches that are working shoulder-to-shoulder in partnership with the community — across multiple domains of business, education, health care, social service and government — to transform a city.

“ We’ve got to figure out how to help people “be church” who cannot or will not “go to church” as it exists now.

More than one in five Americans who say they are absolutely sure about believing in God virtually never attend church, according to Robert Putnam (*American Grace*, 473). This is why missional engagement beyond the walls of traditional church real estate and programming is the path to the future. We’ve got to figure out how to help people “be church” who cannot or will not go to church as it exists now.

While we’re losing ground when it comes to attracting people to our worship services, what I call an altruism economy is attracting our friends to works of service. So invite your neighbors or co-workers to church, and they may say “no” — no matter how sexy your sax player or how cool your

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smoke machine. But invite them to serve alongside you at the local school next Saturday, and they're more likely to say "yes," and to ask if the whole family can come too!

A New Scorecard

Missional ministry requires a different scorecard than churches have used in the past. In this new missional world, there are dynamic metrics that can measure a church's effectiveness in the community. Measures might include:

- How many backpacks were delivered for a weekend supply of food?
- How much money is the church giving away?
- How many life coaches are deployed outside the church?
- How many volunteer hours are church members logging outside the walls?
- How many cross-domain collaborations is the church engaged with?

A revamped scorecard also means resource reallocation — our prayer, time, people, money, facilities and technology. How would prayer, and money and time be redirected for community development? And once you change the scorecard, you change the game. What gets rewarded gets done. Once you change what you're celebrating, you get more of that.

True Collaboration

Unfortunately, churches have a spotty history of true collaboration across multiple domains in a community. We're not very good at collaboration, because we want to be the show. If we want to drive the ideas and staff it with our people and invite people into the presence we've created, we may be missing cross-domain collaboration in the process.

Real collaboration goes beyond selling a great idea to the city, and getting them to give us resources. We need to figure out how to convene and create cross-domain partners, not just targets or functional users. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, or put our efforts solely under our own label. Whatever needs to get done in a community, there are probably community agencies already there. Why aren't we figuring out how to get behind the Salvation Army, for instance, to care for the homeless? That's the collaborative mentality.

I believe this is a movement of the Spirit, like scales falling from people's eyes. God seems to be having a different conversation with the church about its role in the world. There is a rise of Kingdom consciousness vs. my-church-only awareness. We are becoming more willing to pitch our fortune and future with the community. This movement will convene the church around service – not around politics or around being a moral watchdog for the community – but around loving your neighbor. The Spirit is calling us out to *be* church better, not *do* church better.

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About Author

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Reggie McNeal serves as the Missional Leadership Specialist for Leadership Network of Dallas, TX. His latest book is *Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (Jossey-Bass, 2011). It is available through [Amazon](#) and [Cokesbury](#).

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